

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, Senator Miner, Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today on HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023. I am here to discuss the important investments through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. My name is **Cathleen Meaden** and I work for Columbus House in **New Haven, CT** and am a resident of **Meriden, CT**.

I have worked for over 30 years in the human services field. My experience has included working as a substance abuse counselor in a treatment facility, as a housing case manager for DCF involved families, as a Director of a Re-Entry Housing Program for individuals leaving our institutions and as the Director of Housing for individuals in the homeless system. In all these areas there is one common issue that affects everyone – that issue is the lack of housing.

We live in a society that accepts that it is inhumane to have someone starve. We could not imagine refusing a person water or air or clothing. But, for some reason we think that housing is something that a person must EARN. Housing is as necessary to survival as food, water, air and clothing. It is a basic human need. We must begin to treat it as a human right.

All of our society's problems are exacerbated by homelessness. Every problem from Mental Health to Substance Use, to criminal justice, to unemployment, to overwhelmed hospitals are directly impacted by a lack of housing. If there is only one thing that we could do – Housing should be at the top of the list.

Unlike some of the more complicated social issues of today like mental health or substance use, or even criminal justice issues, homelessness has a very simple solution. Housing IS the solution to homelessness. Let me say that again HOUSING IS the solution to homelessness. It really is that simple.

I want you to close your eyes and imagine this scene for just a moment. A 35-year-old woman walks into your office – she is crying and begging because she has no place to sleep tonight. She NEEDS you to help her. She is afraid of being on the streets alone, has no where to go and no one to turn to. In your town there is 100 shelter beds and all of them are full. There is also 150 people on the wait list to get into the shelter. You must tell her that aside from putting her on the wait list and getting her connected with an outreach worker there is nothing you can do for her tonight. This is not a made-up story. It is one that is being repeated every day across CT. We are unable to meet the most basic need of housing for the residents of CT. We can do better. We must do better.

So I beg of you to support the investment in the homeless system in the DMHAS budget as below

- I support the preservation of DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line at \$23.404 million;
- I support the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance long term plan to restore at least \$461 million to community nonprofits, which includes housing and homeless service organizations funded by DMHAS;
- I support an additional \$13.34 million in FY 23 (*including \$5.26 million increase in DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line, and \$8.08 million at DOH*) to provide homeless and housing service organizations funding for adequate wages, benefits, and professional development for front line workers, increasing rent and utility costs, and better access to technology;

- I support the Governor's proposed use of \$2.8 million of ARPA (\$1.1m FY23; \$1.1m FY24; \$562,000 FY25) for wrap-around services for 150 units of supportive housing. Supportive services are an **ongoing need and require a permanent investment**, and as such we are asking Appropriations to **support an increase** in DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line of \$2.25 million in FY23 to expand supportive services to 300 scattered site and development units for highly vulnerable individuals and families with persistent obstacles to maintaining housing stability

Thank you for your time,

Cathleen Meaden